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A Nordic Country with East European Problems: British Views on Post-War Finland, 1944–1948¹

Abstract

Documents published in the latest volume of DBPO reveal interesting shifts in British views on Finland's odds of survival in the changing post-war geopolitical situation. In 1944–45, the British government put the maintenance of the wartime alliance with the Soviet Union first and identified its interests in Finland, considered to lie in the Soviet security sphere, very narrowly. However, after this initial period of marked pessimism over Finland's fate, the Foreign Office identified factors and trends which indicated that the Finns could carve a distinct position for themselves in the no-man's land between the emerging Cold War blocs. By 1948, careful, yet guarded, optimism of Finland as a Nordic country capable of retaining its sovereignty and Western connections superseded an earlier view of Finland as an East European country, bound to fall under complete Soviet domination sooner or later.

As Finland's position improved, so Britain's interests gradually widened. Were Finland now to fall under Soviet domination, the UK and the West had more to lose. In the absence of means to match Soviet influence in Finnish foreign policy and domestic affairs, British policy was defined in terms of applying 'soft power' to preserve Western interests: cultural and economic relations, propaganda and information campaigns, and the cultivation of personal contacts with leading Finns. Subsequently, pessimism and optimism oscillated in British analyses of the situation in Finland and assessments of how well this soft power worked, or what means of influence were available. At the same time, a determined effort was made to contain the expansion of Soviet influence in Northern Europe to Finland.

Eden's August 1944 Policy

In a seminal work on Finland in international politics in the post-war years, the Finnish historian Tuomo Polvinen began his account with a memorandum prepared for the War Cabinet by Sir Anthony Eden, the British foreign secretary on 9 August 1944.² Eden first discussed at length the challenges posed by the Soviet Union in Europe. After dealing with the weightier and thornier issues, Eden briefly considered how the underlying geopolitical shifts influenced British standing and interests in Northern Europe.

Referring to likely developments in Soviet post-war foreign policy, Eden assumed that it 'might seek cooperation with the Western powers' to cope with the 'monumental task of reconstruction'. As long as the German threat was and remained neutralised, it would be unlikely that 'the Soviet Union might try to take advantage of its military gains during the war by continuing to expand and by trying, with the aid of the extreme left, to provoke an open conflict with the forces of imperialism.' Therefore, if 'the Soviet Union showed a desire to respect Britain's vital strategic interests, His Majesty's Government had no cause to oppose the wishes of the Soviet government provided they were reasonable and did not conflict with British interests'.³

Turning to Scandinavia, and with the exit of Finland from the war in sight, Eden 'could not foresee any incompatibility between British and Soviet interests'. Moscow would undoubtedly support left-wing parties throughout the region, but this was not particularly worrisome, since the parties of the extreme left were weak in Scandinavia. Eden saw no signs of 'any Soviet designs for territorial expansion in this area; on the contrary, Stalin had offered bases in Denmark and Norway to Britain in the Moscow talks in December 1941'.⁴

Finland on the other hand was firmly and, as it seemed, irreversibly under Soviet military and political influence. Reminding the Cabinet how Stalin had asserted his rights during the Anglo-Soviet talks in 1941, Eden wrote that the 'Russians claimed Finland as within their security sphere'. The Soviets insisted on the restoration of the frontier settled in the Moscow peace of 1940, the ceding of Petsamo facing the Arctic Sea in the high north, and 'some kind of military alliance which would give the Russians the right to maintain naval and military bases on Finnish territory'.⁵

'We have agreed to these terms', Eden stated bluntly. In an often quoted paragraph he elaborated further British policy towards Finland: 'Although we shall no doubt hope that Finland will be left some real degree of at least cultural and commercial independence and a parliamentary regime, Russian influence will in any event be predominant in Finland and we shall not be able, nor would it serve any important British interests, to contest that influence.'⁶

There, therefore, British policy lay, and little could or should be done to change it. A dividing line between Soviet and British spheres of influence went along Finland's western borders with Sweden and Norway. The three Scandinavian countries belonged to the British sphere.

Finland, together with the three small Baltic Republics that had already been written off earlier, was in the Soviet one.

Many historians have found Eden's August 1944 memorandum illuminating and a succinct expression of the new geopolitical realities which the outcome of the Second World War, especially the Soviet Union's victory over Germany in the east, left in its wake. Eden's views are widely held, and not only by Tuomo Polvinen, to have formed the bare facts upon which British policy towards Finland rested throughout the post-war period, and beyond.⁷ 'It is fortunate for the historian', the British historian Anthony Upton later wrote, 'and saves much labour, that the British government had settled on a policy towards Finland in August 1944, adhered to it constantly thereafter, and was honest enough to tell the Finnish government what it was, so that they could adapt to it'.⁸ Finland was in the Soviet sphere militarily and politically, and His Majesty's Government had no intention or the means to challenge this state of affairs.

If we take our cue from Upton's thesis, and have Eden's memorandum as our starting point, the history of Anglo-Finnish relations in the Cold War would not then be much more than mere footnotes to what was settled in August 1944. It is therefore interesting to find out – from reading the documents published in this handsome volume of Documents on British Policy Overseas (DBPO) – how far and for how long subsequent policy-makers actually followed Eden's recommendations. And if changes in the basic assessment of the facts on the ground in Finland took place, what these were, and if they led the British to review their policy, what this then became.

Finland in Eastern Europe

When reading Eden's words from August 1944, two qualifications must be made at the outset. The first is that the policy recommendations were based on a rather optimistic assumption that the wartime Anglo-Soviet alliance would continue in some form of understanding after the defeat of Germany. The other reservation concerns the way in which Soviet geopolitical and ideological aims were construed. Eden's rather straightforward reading of Soviet aims as primarily defensive, and that the Soviet Union would not seek further expansion from where the war against Hitler took it, were by the summer of 1944 hardly representative of British expert opinion in its entirety, and even on Eden's behalf probably reflected more war-weary hopefulness than verisimilitude.

As was shown within the next one and half years, the first assumption proved false, and a Cold War followed between the wartime allies. Indeed, first signs of serious trouble among the Big Three became visible between the British and the Soviets in 1945–46, and only

somewhat later between the United States and the Soviet Union. The foundations of the second premise – of the limited nature of Soviet intentions – dissipated as well, as more deeply seated suspicions of Russian expansionism resurfaced at the war's end.

The third consideration, which may escape our attention, is that Eden was outlining policy towards a country with which the British were still at war. The United Kingdom had declared war on Finland in December 1941 and was therefore involved in the armistice talks and in drafting the final Paris peace treaty of 1947. A war between modern parliamentary democracies was perhaps only one of the oddities of the world war, but strange or not, it none the less defined most of the political agenda in Anglo-Finnish relations when the war came to a close in 1944–45.⁹

At first, however, the foundations of the August 1944 policy held good, and His Majesty's Government followed developments in Finland conditioned by this approach. How deeply ingrained the view of Finland as just another East European country within the Soviet sphere was, could be seen in Eden's memorandum to the War Cabinet on 24 September 1944, where he reported on the Finnish armistice terms agreed in Moscow.¹⁰

While the Finns were dismayed by the severity of the terms imposed on them, including as they did large scale territorial losses, massive reparations, rapid demobilisation of Finnish forces while effectively opening a new front in the north with conscripts to fight the seasoned Germans, a Soviet military and a naval base at the doorstep of the country's capital Helsinki, requirements for domestic political changes and the entry of a Soviet-led Allied Control Commission (ACC) into the country to supervise the execution of the armistice terms, Eden's view was quite different. 'The main terms are, in most respects, those which were published and generally hailed as moderate when they were rejected by the Finns at an earlier stage', Eden informed the Cabinet. 'Although they are not light', the terms did not mean that Finland would 'cease to exist as an independent nation', Eden continued.¹¹

The final peace treaty remained to be concluded later, but Eden was pleased to see that 'the full extent of Russia's main demands on Finland are [sic] now fixed and known. This is, I consider, all to the good'. The British had also played their part in making the terms more bearable to the Finns, as they had insisted that the reparations burden should not be insuperable for Finland to cope with, and most importantly, prevent them from contributing to the British reconstruction effort with their timber resources. Nor was the new Soviet military base next to Helsinki something to be so depressed about, as the head of the Swedish Foreign Office appeared to be. 'Helsinki would be just as much under a permanent threat from Russian bombers were there no base at Porkkala-Ud', Eden wrote. This indicated that the foreign secretary was, together with the Chiefs of Staff, apparently unaware how indefensible the base made the whole of southern Finland and the capital area. Besides being a base for operations on land and sea, it brought the capital within the range of the Red Army's heavy artillery – something it had never managed to achieve by force during the war.¹²

The Finnish leaders saw things differently. 'We are in the hands of the Russians', the newly elected Finnish president, Field-Marshal Carl Mannerheim told his close confidant, Prime Minister Juho Kusti Paasikivi, who would succeed him as president of the republic in 1946. 'The agreement does not speak about capitulation, but in reality the armistice is capitulation. We cannot defend ourselves', the dispirited and discouraged Field-Marshal, whose army had not been defeated in the battlefield, poured out his pessimism.¹³

As it appeared, and what the British mostly sought after, was not Finland's survival as such, but regional stability; a new status quo in Scandinavia and the Baltic area that both they and the Soviet Union could agree upon and respect. As is well known, the British were at the same time seeking an understanding of their respective spheres of influence in the Danubian and Balkan countries in the infamous 'percentages agreement', tabled by Prime Minister Winston Churchill in Moscow in October 1944. Eden's views on Finland and the Scandinavian countries were not too distant echoes of this type of understanding brewing in Anglo-Soviet relations in general, only that in the north not only were there no percentages, but no explicit understanding either.

In the absence of agreements, or percentages, what decided the matter were the facts on the ground and the respective parties' behaviour. The passive stance adopted by the British both in the armistice talks in Moscow and subsequently in the Allied Control Commission in Helsinki, effectively communicated the British hope – both to the Soviets and to the Finns – that neither Finland nor the Northern region as a whole should become another 'Balkan question', nor pose such difficulties as, for example, the future of Poland did among the wartime allies.

The reading of Eden's memoranda from autumn 1944 and the reports from Helsinki by Francis Shepherd, the British political representative, indeed confirm the views expressed in standard historical accounts of how the August 1944 policy was carried out in Finland when peace came.¹⁴ Shepherd's meeting in February 1945 with Colonel-General Andrei Zhdanov, the Control Commission's notorious chairman, showed certain reserve on both sides, but views on delicate topics were generally exchanged in a friendly manner, and the discussion also made clear how the British mission in Helsinki respected the Soviet's leading role and had no intention of challenging it.

The main task was to steer Finland away from its previous alignment with Germany, militarism and anti-Soviet sentiments. However, the Finns were not necessarily quick learners. 'We agreed about the slowness of the Finns in any kind of action, their absorption in themselves and their ignorance of affairs outside their own country', Shepherd reported. So, the Allies had to work closely together to make progress. 'We were cooperating satisfactorily', Shepherd told Zhdanov, 'but it would be a good thing for an occasional demonstration of solidarity to be brought home to the Finns'.¹⁵

Towards the end of their talk, Shepherd also raised the issue of British journalists' visits to Finland to observe the forthcoming parliamentary elections. Given that Finland's elections were the first democratic elections to be held in post-war Europe, their integrity was of obvious interest to the British, as well as the fact the Finnish communists were expected to make large gains in them. Here Shepherd quickly found out where Soviet sensitivities were.

Without directly touching the elections themselves, Shepherd mentioned how British journalists would be interested to travel to Finland alongside their Swedish colleagues 'for a day or two' during the elections, and that he 'would try to let the commission know if and when journalists did come'. That this was a sensitive subject for the Soviets was made clear to Shepherd, who reported how while he 'was introducing the subject I noticed that M. Orlov [Zhdanov's deputy] was beating a loud tattoo with his fingers on the back of his sofa, evidently with intention of warning me off it.' Shepherd, however, continued with it, and informed the 'somewhat embarrassed' Colonel-General of the forthcoming journalists' visits, who raised no objection to the matter. However, this was as far as Shepherd was willing to test the cooperative spirit of the allies.¹⁶

The Soviet Defensive Sphere in the North

In the parliamentary elections of March 1945 the Finnish communists indeed made gains and formed a new government together with social democrats and centrist-agrarian forces. According to the prevailing view in London of Finland as an East European country, this was probably to be expected, and merely strengthened the image of Finland lying firmly within the Soviet sphere. Despite the intense interest in the outcome of the elections, more important was the resumption of normal trading contacts in the spring of 1945, after which Finland retook its position as one of Britain's principal suppliers of timber and related products.¹⁷

The basic view of Finland changed little until the following summer. In a dispatch from Helsinki on 24 July 1945, Francis Shepherd elaborated the mutually beneficial nature of the resumed trade relations between Finland and Britain, but reminded London that in spite of these contacts in the economic sphere, Finland was 'definitely in the Russian defensive sphere'. 'There is presumably no doubt that we shall do our utmost to retain and improve our interests in the other Scandinavian countries, but Finland is in an intermediate position', Shepherd wrote. It was a 'matter for consideration, whether, after a certain point, British interests in Finland would not invoke counter-measures by Soviet Russia which might not only nullify our own efforts but might even have the opposite effect'.¹⁸

With the war in Europe over, the question of the final peace settlement became acute. In that connexion the British had their eyes set on the future of Finland's military forces. The view, that it was to be expected, that the Finnish army was being 'recast on the Russian model', and rearmed with Soviet weapons, was shared by the Helsinki mission and officials in London alike.¹⁹ Although the recasting did not eventually go quite as far as this, British arms exporters subsequently found Soviet competition to be tough on several occasions during the Cold War. In 1945 what was most important, however, was what the prospect of maintaining a Finnish military capability meant in the worsening political climate between Britain and the Soviet Union.

In the summer of 1945 rumours circulated that a Soviet-Finnish military pact was in the making. Even if it was difficult to ascertain how quickly this would materialise and how serious the reported preliminary talks and speculations were, the British gave the information serious thought and followed the issue closely.²⁰ According to the still prevailing 'August 1944' view of Finland in the Foreign Office, it was concluded in July 1945 that a 'Soviet-Finnish treaty of alliance would be unlikely to do more than confirm the actual state of affairs'.²¹ However, the reasoning that followed this assessment provided an indication that in London policy-makers were having second thoughts of writing Finland off more or less completely.

As Finland had practically no relevance in the military-strategic calculations of the Chiefs of Staff at this point, the question of an alliance between it and the Soviet Union had little intrinsic value. That, however, did not mean that the issue was irrelevant. A concern expressed in the summer 1945, which would also be typical in British Cold War views of Finland, was related to the effects which Soviet policy in Finland would have elsewhere in the region, especially in Scandinavia, but also perhaps even more widely in Europe. While the prospect of a Soviet-Finnish military alliance was discussed, it was pointed out how a Soviet treaty with Finland together with Roumania, Bulgaria and Hungary 'would have most depressing effect on the limitrophe Allied countries, such as Norway and Greece, who would be alarmed at the strength of the new combination of alliances with Soviet Russia as the centre piece'.²²

The first step towards revising the basic British policy towards Finland was then the acknowledgment that perhaps Britain should not just remain a bystander as the Soviets consolidated their interests in Finland. 'The disadvantages of aligning Europe into two camps are obvious', a briefing paper prepared at the FO noted in July. 'But if the Soviet Government proceed with their plans, there would be even greater disadvantage in our merely watching without doing anything to put heart into our friends who live on the border of this Russian system of alliances'.²³

The question remained how to meet the Soviet challenge, which was another concern that would be revisited time after time. In the summer of 1945, the way the world was being then reorganised, appeared to present one possible answer. As was contemplated in the FO

briefing paper, Finland's participation in the newly created 'World Organisation' might provide one way to counter the trend. As it was suggested in the Foreign Office, Finland's admission to the United Nations Organisation, which, after concluding an alliance with the Finns, the Soviets would be 'in a weak position to oppose', might bring it 'a little out of the Russian orbit and into the wider of community of nations'.²⁴

As a practical policy, Finland's UN membership was not a strong position to achieve much, but the significance was not in the answer provided, but in the question that was asked: how to pull Finland 'a little out' of the Russian orbit? The first winds of the Cold War had started to blow, and would soon lead the British to modify their August 1944 policy towards Finland and develop a Cold War strategy to meet the Soviet challenge there and in the region. In the first phase, however, the visible increase of Soviet influence in the vicinity of its western borders, led to mixed responses.

Besides the prospect of a military alliance between Finland and the Soviet Union, a key issue in 1945 and much of 1946 was the question of Finland's future military potential. It was restricted by a range of stipulations in the final Paris peace treaty that came into force in 1947. As is shown with ample evidence by the historians Tuomo Polvinen and Pekka Visuri, it was indeed the expectation that Finnish military power would only contribute to Soviet aggregate military strength in a future conflict that led the British to insist on the rather strict limitations put on Finnish military forces as to their numbers and weaponry in the Paris peace treaty.

That the restrictions originated from London and not from Moscow, was one of the rather less well received surprises the Finns learned in the 1970s, when historians began to be able to access the relevant files in the Public Record Office. As it happened, Finland was lumped together with Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary, all of whose military forces were limited by the peace treaty as a result of Britain's demands.²⁵ In this respect, Cold War considerations in Britain's policy towards Finland led first into a negative policy aimed at minimizing Finland's military usefulness to the Soviet Union rather than maximising its ability to withstand Soviet political, economic and military pressure – the latter of which would have been obviously easier and credible had the country been able to arm itself with modern weapons.

Cold War Views Crystallise

As Anglo-Soviet relations became gradually more strained in the course of 1945, Britain's policy towards Finland was revised. New nuances emerged also in the British assessment of

the situation in Finland. These changes were reflected in how the new developments were received in London.

As an undercurrent of the negative British Cold War policy line towards Finland however, there was, from the beginning, a positive one as well. In time, it overtook the negative policy, although the negative one did not vanish altogether. First, however, hard questions had to be asked on the state of Anglo-Soviet relations as a whole.

At first, it seemed that Anglo-Soviet cooperation worked rather well in the Allied Control Commission (ACC) in Helsinki, in particular in comparison with other similar arrangements in Germany's ex-satellite countries. However, diverse practical difficulties and tensions with the Soviet element in the ACC in Finland, and in particular changes the Soviets had made in the Finnish armistice agreement after hostilities had ended in Europe in May, led the British military representatives to ponder how long they should continue the policy 'appeasement' towards their Soviet counterparts, which they continued 'in the absence of guidance' from the Foreign Office.²⁶

This pondering without guidance did not last long. From the summer 1945 onwards, and definitely by late 1945 - early 1946 we can see that all the key elements of a new British policy towards Finland have taken shape. By 1948 this rethinking had moulded into an approach which, with some modifications, formed the basis of Britain's Cold War policy towards Finland and the Nordic region; what British interests were, how to maintain them and to contain Soviet influence, and by and large handle Finland's relations with the West.

The critical turn in British views on Finland can be seen in a number of documents from November 1945 to February 1946, some of which are also now available now in this DBPO volume. On 24 November 1945 Shepherd despatched a lengthy report by Colonel James Magill, a member of the British element of the ACC, with a covering letter to Foreign Secretary Ernst Bevin that proved pivotal in determining what line the British should take in the region given the worsening relations with the Soviet Union.

In his report of 30 October 1945, Magill suggested that a more coordinated British policy should be developed for Finland and Scandinavia. Magill, in somewhat alarmist terms, saw the Soviet Union developing a potentially dangerous platform for its 'complete domination of the whole of Scandinavia. He advised that Britain should try to prevent this, 'since in time of peace this would interfere with our trade and in time of war would mean that parts of Scandinavia could be used as a base for operations against Great Britain and her sea communications'.²⁷

Scandinavia seemed to be a military vacuum, which in a time of crisis would be filled from the east. Britain should offer assistance to the Scandinavian countries and help them to gain confidence and develop closer Scandinavian cooperation. Britain should let the Scandinavians know that it did not intend to let them to 'slide unresisting into the jaws of Russia', as Magill

phrased it. Britain needed to coordinate its policies towards Scandinavia in general and towards Sweden, 'the key to the problem', in particular.²⁸

Magill's reading of Soviet intentions in northern Europe diverged from views that were still considered as established notions in London, and which also had formed the second premise of Eden's August 1944 memorandum, namely that Stalin's aims were limited. Echoing views that had rapidly gained ground among British military experts and planners from 1944 onwards, Magill took it practically for granted that the Soviet Union was also expanding its sphere of influence in the north. However, Foreign Office officials were not at all convinced that there was much evidence to prove that this was the case. In the Northern Department the general feeling in November 1945 was still, that this conclusion was 'premature, to say the least of it'.²⁹ The Foreign Office needed more factual details and evidence about Soviet intentions, before a coordinated containment policy could be formulated for Scandinavia.

Although the evidence of Soviet expansionism was slender, Magill's views were supported by Shepherd in his covering dispatch to Bevin, as well as by Thomas Brimelow, the Russian desk officer in the Northern Department, who thought Magill's views 'a pretty fair summary of the admittedly limited and inconclusive evidence available'.³⁰ 'While Russian military domination of Finland is inevitable', Shepherd thought, 'there are I think good grounds for resisting so far as possible too strong a domination in other respects'. 'It would be to our advantage therefore, even from the strategic point of view, to encourage not only Finnish independence but also the western form of democracy in Finland, Finnish cultural relations with Scandinavia and Western Europe, and Finnish affinity with Scandinavia in general. For these reasons, I believe that Finland should be treated as part of Scandinavia on all planes other than the military plane', Shepherd wrote.³¹

It did not take long for the ideas of Finland's closer attachment with the free standing and independent minded Scandinavians to find broader resonance and become an established view in London. In a couple of months time the views held at first by British representatives in Helsinki and in the ACC became a new orthodoxy, which led to a revision of the August 1944 policy. This happened, of course, as part and parcel of a bigger change in the British view of the post-war world. The general mood and thinking about Stalin's intentions was switching into a Cold War mode among British policy-makers at large, and soon thereafter by the wider public as well.³² The perception of hostile Soviet intentions on a wide front of issues and areas was particularly important to the way those policymakers who were most immediately responsible for Scandinavian affairs in the Foreign Office (Christopher Warner and his successor as Head of Northern Department, Robin Hankey) saw Scandinavia. The influence the Soviet Union might be able to exert beyond Finnish borders to Scandinavia, was a particular source of concern.

'We agree generally with your despatch', Christopher Warner, a key official handling Soviet and Northern European affairs in the Foreign Office, wrote to Francis Shepherd on 26 February 1946.³³ As a part of a general trend and crystallization of a negative image of Soviet intentions,

a major shift in the Foreign Office's thinking of the challenge posed by the Soviet Union in the north, had taken place. 'I think that we should *assume* and encourage Finnish independence', Warner wrote.³⁴ But again, how to achieve this, was a problem. '[It] is perhaps rather a question of not discouraging Finnish affinity with the rest of Scandinavia rather than encouraging it', Warner suggested as Britain's low key approach in Finland. Anything the British might be able to do for Finland, could be easily offset if the Soviet Union was provoked to act in Finland.

Also how the Finns would and could themselves handle their position in the emerging Cold War no-man's land, was uncertain. It was not clear whether they themselves were either too soft or not determined to withstand Soviet pressure or fight communism at home, an issue which was repeatedly raised in subsequent Cold War years.³⁵ Or that they were too hard and determined, and only too eager to engage in anti-communist and anti-Soviet campaigning, which would only do harm to themselves and bring no benefit for others.³⁶ As Warner observed, 'too rash a demonstration of independence from the Finns' would 'bring about their own punishment from the Russians'. However, anything 'in the nature of a Scandinavian *bloc* or of overt Finnish participation, at the present time at least, in Scandinavian affairs, must be regarded as ruled out by fear of Russia'.³⁷

Finland's difficult position notwithstanding, an important distinction could be made in the winter of 1946 over how Finland had feared its post-war transition, compared to other countries facing the Soviet Union. According to Shepherd in Helsinki, the communists appeared to be losing rather than gaining ground in Finnish domestic politics. 'Finland has got off lightly so far', Warner wrote to Shepherd and advised caution in how to handle what had become 'a delicate balance in Finland': 'This delicate situation could perhaps be easily upset for the worse if we seemed suddenly to have decided to play a stronger hand in Finland'.³⁸

The view of Finland as an East European country at the mercy of the Russians was transformed into a view of Finland as a Nordic country that could – at least in theory – be saved from complete Soviet domination. The perspective, where Finland's position in the emerging Cold War order was defined as a part of the northern front rather than the East European sphere, opened a whole new panorama of possible ways to influence it and counter Soviet influence. How the British should play a hand which seemed to have somewhat improved in 1946, then became the issue that needed to be resolved.

Britain's Soft Power

During 1946 a fundamental change of view took place in London about how to deal with the Soviet Union, and what Britain and the Europeans needed from the United States. Not much remained of the wartime Anglo-Soviet alliance, but hopes were raised about a future one with Western European countries, ultimately involving the Americans. Soviet actions and behaviour were considered, by and large, to be hostile and expansionist. Even if one held a somewhat more understanding basic view of the Soviet leaders' troubled quest for security, the mere presence of Soviet power seemed to contradict British interests wherever London policy-makers set their eyes.

The overall picture, nonetheless, was not uniform. Especially in northern Europe, the nature of the ultimate goals the Soviet Union which may have had, were less clearly resolved by events as they unfolded in the post-war years than elsewhere in Europe. This remains a subject which still today attracts a lively debate by historians. An important and useful point of departure for a discussion about from where and how to analyse Soviet intentions, and also to contain its power, was Finland.

After the British Cold War views had crystallised, Finland served a double purpose. First, in the wider context of British Cold War policy, Finland was a 'canary in the coal mine' whose current health indicated how sulphurous the Soviet breathing in its immediate neighbourhood was. Related to this, was a need to contain the spread of Soviet influence in Finland and within its borders, especially in order to maintain Western standing and interests in Scandinavia.

Secondly, there were concerns and considerations which had mostly local significance, and which had mainly to do with how the Cold War eventually was played out in Finland. Here Finland became an interesting test case of Britain's newly discovered, or rediscovered, source of power in the post-war world.

Having lost its relative economic and military might in the course of the first half of the 20th century, and at the same time most of its political weight in world affairs, Britain still had different mechanisms for exerting influence, and forms of power at its disposal. Whereas with the Scandinavians the British goal became to pull them outright into the Western alliance system, where the core elements consisted of hard military security, with Finland Britain needed an alternative approach. The only feasible way to maintain British interests and fight the Cold War in Finland was to use other means.

'The way is open for us to encourage the Finns to proceed with the development of their own sturdy democracy and to avoid becoming tainted with the totalitarian methods which the Communists would like to introduce', Shepherd wrote from Helsinki on 30 July 1946.³⁹ While encouraging the Finns, the British had to make sure, as Robin Hankey commented Shepherd's letter, that the Finns were not led to believe that 'we can help them if, by opposing Soviet wishes too obstinately, they get themselves into trouble'.⁴⁰

Given the circumstances in the UK and in Finland, to apply British 'soft power', to borrow a scholarly phrase from an age yet to come, might actually deliver the desired objectives: influence Finland on the long run to the right direction, while not turning it in a wrong direction in the short term. In the absence of the kind of power and presence in Finland to match Soviet influence directly, the British should use whatever means they had available: cultural and economic relations, propaganda and information campaigns – either carried out in the open or in the dark – the work of the British Council, BBC broadcasts, and the cultivation of personal contacts with leading Finns and so forth.⁴¹

The first consistent articulation of this approach can be found from February 1947, when Francis Shepherd, soon to leave for his next posting in the warmer climes of the Dutch East-Indies, drafted a formulation of Britain's basic policy towards Finland. According to Shepherd the British aims were to 'encourage, and as far as possible secure, the continued political and economic independence of Finland; and for this purpose to encourage relations with the West in general and discourage undue subordination to the USSR.' In addition to this the British should 'encourage Fenno-British trade', and to 'reinstate friendly relations between the Finnish and British Governments and peoples by means of expanding cultural and business relations'.⁴²

What Shepherd put on paper then reappeared in almost identical words throughout the Cold War in numerous policy guideline documents. A key word in the phrasing was the word 'encourage'. Shepherd informed Foreign Secretary Bevin, that to carry out this policy the UK mission in Helsinki had adopted a method so as to 'exert a maximum of influence with a minimum of display'.⁴³ Not only was Britain's power soft, it should not be too visible either. This was probably something that policy-makers and cabinet ministers grappling with Britain's post-war austerity and the eventual imperial decline, could readily agree to.

How all this would work in practice remained to be seen. After the first Cold War years, pessimism and optimism oscillated in British analyses of the situation in Finland, and how well the soft power approach worked, or what means of influence were available. Cultural diplomacy bore its fruits slowly, and often in intangible ways. In the economic and trade sphere, British self-interest often came first, and a much harder line on the Finns on trade policy was adopted than would have been preferred by officials responsible for the Finland desk at the FO.⁴⁴

At times, the situation on the ground alerted observers in London and led to a renewal of the kind of pessimism that lay behind the August 1944 views. In February 1948, after hearing the news of Stalin's approach to Paasikivi and the forthcoming talks of a military pact, R. G. A. Etherington-Smith from the FO calmed down the Chiefs of Staff, who were certain 'that it was only a matter of time before Finland fell completely under Russian domination like the other Russian satellites'.⁴⁵ That this view was premature was proven by events, but in 1948 it required optimism, and vision, to hold on to the basic policy line. As

Bevin himself, with much foresight, explained to the cabinet in April 1948 the outcome of the Fenno-Soviet pact talks:

‘[T]he firm attitude adopted by the Finnish Government resulted in the signature of a treaty which on the face of it preserved Finland from Soviet interference in her internal affairs and treated her rather as a neutral buffer state than a Soviet satellite. The Soviet government had not pressed for bases in Finland and, although in war the provisions of the treaty for prior consultation before Soviet troops entered Finland might be to little effect, Finland had at least been given a breathing space and in a few years’ time, when she had completed the payment of reparations to Russia, her natural trade interests were likely to strengthen her ties with Western Europe’.⁴⁶

Conclusion

In August 1944 Anthony Eden founded Britain’s post-war European policy in the continuance of the Anglo-Soviet alliance, aimed at ‘preventing any recurrence of German aggression’. Within ‘this framework we might consolidate our position in the countries of Western Europe and Scandinavia, in Turkey, Greece, and eventually, Italy. We should avoid a direct challenge to Russian interests in central European countries adjacent to the Soviet Union, but we ought to avail ourselves of every opportunity to spread British influence in these countries.’⁴⁷

The challenge was how to reconcile the ends with the means. To maintain British standing and interests in the different corners of Europe – not to speak of the world at large – a rethinking of the nature of Britain’s power was essential. ‘In the nineteenth century our power in Europe was greatly enhanced by the fact that we had stood for political as well as industrial progress, and had been willing to use our influence in the support of popular democratic forces against autocracy’, Eden wrote. ‘In the post-war period our influence would depend largely on the extent to which the countries of Europe judged that our methods would be successful in dealing with their social and economic problems.’⁴⁸

Despite the fact that Eden’s recommendations on how to deal with the Soviet Union in Finland and in Scandinavia were subsequently modified, and a more forward and active stance adopted, we can see there the seeds of Britain’s Cold War ‘soft power’ approach.

Soft power alone could hardly move Finland away from its geopolitical location. Soft power, nevertheless, could change ways of thinking, and how the world was, and is, constructed in the minds of people and policy-makers. Soft power wielded in and outside Finland, combined with how ‘their social and economic problems’ were resolved in Finnish domestic life, removed Finland in the late 1940s away from its East European predicament and confirmed its location in Europe as a Nordic country. As a Nordic country, with some skill

and good luck, it could solve its East European problems. As the Cold War came to a close in the 1980s, Finland saw its end as a Nordic country with Nordic problems.

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¹ The title takes its inspiration from the incisive characterization of Finland in the 1930s and in the Second World War by the Finnish historian Oula Silvennoinen: 'Finland was an East European country with East European problems'. Silvennoinen, 'Janus of the North', 2010.

² Anthony Eden's memorandum 'Soviet Policy in Europe outside the Balkans', 9 August 1944, WP (44) 436, CAB 66/53; Summarised in Woodward, *British Foreign Policy in the Second World War*, Vol. III, 123–31, sections on Scandinavia and Finland on pages 130–1; Polvinen, *Between East and West*, 14. The document is not included in the volume of DBPO discussed here.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Woodward, *British Foreign Policy in the Second World War*, 130.

⁶ Polvinen, *Between East and West*, 14.

⁷ For example Nevakivi, *Ystävistä vihollisiksi*, 200. Also other historical works generally mention the thesis, if not always the document.

⁸ Upton, 'Finland, Great Britain and the Cold War, 1944–55', 63.

⁹ The Anglo-Finnish war of 1941–44 was a phoney war of its kind. The only hostilities were British air-raids in the Petsamo harbour area, Liinahamari, in the Arctic on 30th July 1941, where 16 UK planes operating from aircraft carriers were shot down by German air defence stationed in the area. Although there were some Finnish civilian casualties, damage to the port was minimal. To add to the peculiarity, the hostilities took place several months before the declaration of war. After that, the British did not resume them. The significance of the war was political. Manninen, 'War between Friends', 42–7.

¹⁰ Memorandum from Mr Eden to the War Cabinet, 24 September 1944, CAB 121/363. No. 2 in Insall and Salmon, eds., *The Nordic Countries: From War to Cold War*.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid. Porkkala udd is misspelled in the document as Porkkala-Ud.

¹³ Juho Kusti Paasikivi's diary, 6 October 1944.

¹⁴ And not only standard, but revisionist accounts too, such as the scathingly critical analysis of Helena Penelope Evans on British policymaking towards Finland in 1944–47. According to Evans, the British not only wrote but sold Finland off to the Soviets in 1944, and if not necessarily by design, at least by a 'series of errors'. Evans, 'British Involvement in the Finnish Peace', 90–104

¹⁵ Shepherd (Helsinki) to Eden, 6 February 1945, FO 371/47369, N1600/33/56, (No. 5).

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ On the resumption of the Anglo-Finnish timber and pulp trade Aunesluoma, *Paperipatruunat*, 203–10.

¹⁸ Shepherd (Helsinki) to Eden, 24 July 1945, FO 371/47393, N9908/356/56 (No. 16); Warr minute, FO 371/47412, N9686/1743/56, (No. 19).

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Mr Shepherd (Helsinki) to Mr Eden, 8 June 1945, FO 371/47408, N6630/1131/56, (No. 11).

²¹ 'Soviet-Finnish Alliance', unsigned. An enclosure in Haigh to Allen, 25 July 1945, FO 371/47408, N8592/1131/56, (No. 18).

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Polvinen, *Jaltasta Pariisin rauhaan*, 97, 176–178; 238–239; Nevakivi, *Maanalaista diplomatiaa*, 7274–; Visuri, *Totaalisesta sodasta kriisinhallintaan*, 175–177; Visuri, *Puolustusvoimat kylmässä sodassa*, 45–52; Visuri, 'The making of the Paris Peace Treaty', 48–58; Koskimies, *Puolustuskykyinen valtio vai Ruotsin hälytyskello?* Different historians have emphasized somewhat different factors and considerations behind Britain's demands on the limitations of Finland's defensive capability. First accounts on the topic by Polvinen and Nevakivi connected the demands with British interests to limit the military potential of Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary, and also to the Italian treaty. Later research by Visuri, supported more recently by Koskimies, has however established convincingly that the British believed Finnish military assets would be on the Soviet side in a future war and, hence, it was obvious that the UK sought to limit Finland's defense capability as such. As the Cold War matured, views changed, which could be seen in the subsequent eagerness of UK arms exporters to sell modern weapons systems to Finland.

²⁶ Minute from Warr to Warner, 28 July 1945, FO 371/47412, N9686/1743/56, (No. 19).

²⁷ Magill to Howie (Allied Control Commission), 30 October 1945, FO 371/47450, N17623/10928/63G. Not printed in the DPBO collection discussed here. Magill's reporting and its responses are discussed in Aunesluoma, *Britain, Sweden and the Cold War*, 6–7.

²⁸ Magill to Howie, 30 October 1945, FO 371/47450. N17623/10928/63G.

²⁹ Warr minute, 11 November 1945. Also minutes by Brimelow, 12 November and Warner, 25 November, FO 371/47450. In his memoirs Magill later admitted that his alarmism had been premature. Magill, *Tasavalta tulikokeessa*, 106–7.

³⁰ Brimelow minute, 12 November 1945, FO 371/47450. N17623/10928/63G. Not printed in the volume discussed here.

³¹ Shepherd to Bevin, 24 November 1945, FO 371/47450, N17623/10928/63G, (No. 41).

³² On the perception of the Soviet Union, see for example the illustrative memoirs of Frank Roberts. Roberts, *Dealing with Dictators*, 107–10.

³³ Warner to Shepherd, 26 February 1946, FO 371/47450, N17623/10928/56G, (No. 53).

³⁴ Ibid. Emphasis in the original.

³⁵ Vares, *'Is this the Top of the Slippery Slope?'*, 143–66. Also Vares, 'Foes Who Grew Better with Time', and Vares, 'Moral and Stability'.

³⁶ Majander, *'Britain's Dual Approach'*, 105–46.

³⁷ Warner to Shepherd, 26 February 1946, FO 371/47450, N17623/10928/56G, (No. 53).

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Shepherd to Sargent, 30 July 1946, FO 371/56786, N10077/140/38, (No. 70).

⁴⁰ Ibid, Hankey minute.

⁴¹ On UK information and propaganda activities Fields, *Winning Finnish Hearts and Minds*. On British economic and trade diplomacy, and the rather aggressive UK export interest promotion in particular, Jensen-Eriksen, *Hitting Them Hard?*

⁴² Shepherd to Bevin, 15 February 1947, FO 371/65910, N2330/3/56, (No. 86).

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ On the trade disputes Jensen-Eriksen, *Hitting Them Hard?*

⁴⁵ Etherington-Smith to Hankey, 28 February 1948, FO 371/71447, N3331/78/42, (No. 116).

⁴⁶ Extract from Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet held on 8 April 1948, CAB 128/12, CM(48)27, (No. 132).

⁴⁷ Woodward, *British Foreign Policy in the Second World War*, 124–5.

⁴⁸ Woodward, *British Foreign Policy in the Second World War*, 124.